



'Review of Nicola Gordon Bowe, "Wilhelmina Geddes: Life and Work" (Four Courts Press)'

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Nicola Gordon Bowe,
Wilhelmina Geddes: Life and Work,
Dublin, Four Courts Press, 2015,
483 pp, £45.00 (cloth),
ISBN 9781846825323

The Irish-born artist Wilhelmina Geddes is chiefly remembered today for the remarkable stained glass she made from just before the First World War until her death in 1955 but it remains little known that she also designed and made embroidery of equal beauty and originality. A new biography of Geddes reproduces for the first time many of her embroideries, and other designs for textiles, often made in collaboration with her sisters in Belfast before she moved permanently to London in 1925. Geddes began designing and making embroidery in 1918 and her biographer, Nicola Gordon Bowe, contends that 'There is no early 20th-century Modernist needlework directly comparable with her primitivist figurative designs and workmanship' (p. 143). Exhibited in Belfast, Dublin, London and Paris, during the inter-war years, her contemporaries thought they embodied 'a tremendous feeling for the Middle Ages (which seemed to be born in her)' reminding 'one of the Bayeux tapestry' (p. 144). Often diminutive in scale, constructed from simple stitches, in silk or rayon threads on unbleached linen, and frequently depicting religious subject matter, they are also startlingly modern. This important new book will do much to restore Geddes' reputation in which embroidery played a crucial role.